

## **Dynamically Adjusting the Distribution for Dispatching Lot Between Current and Downstream Tool by Using Expertise Weighting Mechanism**

### **Background of the Invention**

#### **5 Field of the Invention**

[0001] This invention relates generally to manufacturing systems. More particularly, this invention relates to computer integrated manufacturing systems that dynamically dispatches product lots for fabrication to subsequent equipment in a manufacturing line.

#### **10 Description of Related Art**

[0002] In competitive manufacturing environments such as fabrication of electronic integrated circuits on substrates, delivery to a committed schedule is one of the most important factors to the operation of the enterprise. However, the tool utilization and quality of the fabrication of the product are almost equally important. The balancing of the loading of equipment or tooling of the various stages of the manufacturing lines of the enterprise must be considered.

[0003] Often to accommodate a "hot lot" or a lot having a very high priority for fabrication, the necessary manufacturing equipment may be idled or have its scheduling minimized to allow acceptance of the "hot lot" upon arrival. In other instances, the operators may not have a complete understanding of the flow of the product through the manufacturing line and may cause certain equipment to

lack product lots for processing or may cause other equipment to have a backlog or long queue of product waiting for the equipment. Supervisors generally observe multiple units or pieces of manufacturing equipment within the manufacturing line and are able to determine if there is no queue or a too long a queue for individual pieces of equipment. The supervisors then communicate changes in the priorities of the lots set for processing in an attempt to adjust the distribution of the queues of the manufacturing equipment.

5 [0004] The operators must then interpret the instructions of the supervisors to attempt to adjust the distribution of the product lots for processing. Often there is 10 a misunderstanding or miscommunication between an operator and the supervisor or the operator makes a mistake in the operation of the equipment. The operator does not react quickly to the instruction or does not comprehend the instructions and the fabrication of the product is further delayed.

15 [0005] "Understanding the Fundamentals of Kanban and Conwip Pull Systems Using Simulation", Marek, et al., Proceedings of the 2001 Winter Simulation Conference, pp: 921-929, found [www.informs-cs.org](http://www.informs-cs.org), 6/21/03 This paper presents an introductory overview and tutorial in simulation modeling and control of serial Kanban and CONWIP (CONstant Work In Process) pull systems using ARENA/SIMAN 3.5/4.0.

20 [0006] U. S. Patent 6,564,113 (Barto, et al.), describes a Lot start agent that calculates virtual WIP time in a multi-product and multi-bottleneck manufacturing environment. A system and method are provided for calculating virtual WIP time

("VWIP"). The system and method provide for the calculation of one or more bottleneck VWIP values.

[0007] U. S. Patent 6,470,227 (Rangachari, et al.), describes a method and the apparatus for automating a microelectric manufacturing process by configuring application objects that implement a domain knowledge for a piece of equipment and then implementing a workflow. The method is embodied in a computer program that is part of a computer system.

[0008] U. S. Patent 6,259,959 (Martin) describes a method for determining the performance components of a manufacturing line. A process for optimizing a manufacturing line including raw processing times of a plurality of work centers; summing the work center raw processing times, determining work center cycle times, dividing the work center cycle times by respective ones.

[0009] U. S. Patent 6,128,588 (Chacon) describes an integrated wafer fab time standard (machine tact) database. An integrated wafer fab production characterization and scheduling system incorporates a manufacturing execution system with a scheduling system based on simulation. The system provides a simulation tool integrated with the manufacturing execution system to evaluate proposed production control logic. Also included are: integration of preventive maintenance scheduling, Kanban based WIP control, an integrated time standard database, and real time lot move updates.

[0010] U. S. Patent 5,826,238 (Chen, et al.) describes a method and system that operates a data processing system. This includes a data base computer system and a resource allocation computer for control of resource allocation. The method has several steps including: deriving data from the storage means and computing the targets for each of the stages; obtaining machine capacity data from the data storage means and employing the machine capacity data for allocating machine capacity proportionally and adjusting targets.

[0011] U. S. Patent 5,768,133 (Chen, et al.) describes a WIP/move management tool for semiconductor manufacturing plant and method of operation thereof. This interactive data processing system and/or method is a management tool for a manufacturing plant including a shop floor control system. A server contains a data engine for extracting data, a load and transform data unit, and a database management storage unit. The database management storage unit supplies data to an interactive graphic user interface.

## 15 Summary of the Invention

[0012] An object of this invention is to provide a system and method that prioritizes product lots for fabrication and dispatching to manufacturing equipment.

[0013] Another object of this invention is to provide a system and method that establishes a priority for dispatching product lots to manufacturing equipment

based on a criticality factor of manufacturing equipment following the current equipment.

[0014] Further, another object of this invention is to provide a system and method that establishes a priority for dispatching product lots to manufacturing equipment based on a processing capability and efficiency of manufacturing equipment following the current equipment. The manufacturing equipment for example is equipment used for fabricating integrated circuits upon a substrate. This equipment includes semiconductor wafer cleaning equipment and furnaces used for processing the substrates to fabricate the integrated circuits.

10 [0015] To accomplish at least one of these objects, a computer integrated manufacturing system executes program processes that function as a lot dispatcher and a priority factor calculator. The lot dispatcher is in communication with an order entry system in order to receive requests for the fabrication of a product lot. The lot dispatcher is further in communication with a process information system to receive procedures defining which manufacturing equipment is required for the fabrication of the product lot. A manufacturing information system provides the lot dispatcher with the status of the fabrication of the product lot, a criticality factor for each piece of manufacturing equipment, and a queue level for each piece of manufacturing equipment that follows a current group of pieces of manufacturing equipment required for the product lot.

15

20 [0016] The priority factor calculator is in communication with the lot dispatcher to receive a listing of the manufacturing equipment required for the fabrication of

product, the criticality factor of the manufacturing equipment, the processing capacity of the manufacturing equipment, the efficiency of the manufacturing equipment, and the queue level. The priority factor calculator then determines a Kanban factor or priority factor for the product lot such that each group of pieces of manufacturing equipment following the current group of pieces of manufacturing equipment has a balanced loading and the product lot is processed at an expeditious time for on-time delivery.

5 [0017] The priority factor calculator determines the Kanban or priority factor based on the criticality factor and the types of equipment employed in the 10 following steps of the process for fabricating the product lots. The priority factor is calculated at a first level when groups of first following pieces of manufacturing equipment have a criticality factor of a first level. Alternately, the priority factor is calculated at a second level when groups of first following pieces of manufacturing equipment are of a first type and if groups of second following 15 pieces of manufacturing equipment are of a second type.

20 [0018] The magnitudes of the first and second priority levels as calculated determine whether the product lots are dispatched immediately with a higher priority or are placed on the queue and handled in normal order. If the magnitude of the first priority level achieves a threshold level, the product lot is immediately dispatched for processing. On the other hand, if the second priority level achieves the threshold level, the product lot is immediately dispatched for processing.

[0019] The priority factor calculator determines the first priority factor level by the formula:

$$KF\_1 = \frac{WIP\_c}{TOOL\#_c * PPH\_c * EFF\_c}$$

where:

5 **KF\_1** is the first priority level for of a product lot entering a group of current pieces of manufacturing equipment

**WIP\_c** is a number of items within all product lots in a queue for the group of first following pieces of manufacturing equipment,

**TOOL#\_c** is the number of pieces of equipment within a group of the first following pieces of manufacturing equipment;

**PPH\_c** is the average number of items of product capable of being manufactured by the group of the first following pieces of manufacturing equipment,

**EFF\_c** is an efficiency factor for the group of the first following pieces of manufacturing equipment.

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[0020] The priority factor calculator determines the second priority level by the formula:

$$KF\_2 = \frac{WIP\_{cd} + INPR\_{cd} + WIP\_{d}}{TOOL\#_d * PPH\_d * EFF\_d}$$

where:

**KF\_2** is the second priority level for of a product lot entering a current group of pieces of manufacturing equipment

**WIP\_cd** is a number of items within all product lots in a queue for 5 the group of first following pieces of manufacturing equipment and the group of second following pieces of manufacturing equipment,

**INPR\_cd** is a number of items within all product lots in a queue for 10 the group of first following pieces of manufacturing equipment which are to proceed subsequently to the group of second following pieces of manufacturing equipment,

**WIP\_d** is a number of items within all product lots in a queue for the group of second following pieces of manufacturing equipment,

**TOOL#\_d** is the number of pieces of equipment within a group of 15 the second following pieces of manufacturing equipment;

**PPH\_d** is the average number of items of product capable being manufactured by the group of the second following pieces of manufacturing equipment,

**EFF\_d** is an efficiency factor for the group of the second following 20 pieces of manufacturing equipment.

[0021] If the group of first following pieces of manufacturing equipment has a criticality factor of a second level, the priority factor has a third priority level, which indicates that the product lot should not be dispatched immediately for processing and the product lot is placed on a queue of one of the first following pieces of manufacturing equipment. Similarly, if the group of first following pieces of manufacturing equipment is not of the first type, the priority factor has a fourth priority level, which indicates that the product lot should not be dispatched immediately for processing and the product lot is placed on a queue of one of the first following pieces of manufacturing equipment. Also, similarly, if the group of second following pieces of manufacturing equipment are not of the second type, the priority factor has a fifth priority level, which indicates that the product lot should not be immediately dispatched for processing and the product lot is placed on one queue of one of the first following pieces of manufacturing equipment. Finally, if the group of first following pieces of manufacturing equipment is of the first type, and the group of second following pieces of manufacturing equipment is of the second type, and the group of second following pieces of manufacturing equipment has a criticality factor that is not the first level, the priority factor has a sixth priority level. The sixth priority level indicates that the product lot should not be dispatched immediately for processing and the product lot is placed on a queue of one of the first following pieces of manufacturing equipment.

### Brief Description of the Drawings

[0022] Fig. 1 is a diagram illustrating a manufacturing enterprise with a computer integrated manufacturing system that provides a product lot dispatching system of this invention.

5 [0023] Fig. 2 is an example of a routing diagram illustrating the status and factors of the manufacturing equipment to be employed in the fabrication of particular product lots that provide the necessary information for the determining of a Kanban or priority factor of this invention.

10 [0024] Fig. 3 is a flow chart of the method for determining the priority for dynamically dispatching product lots to manufacturing equipment of this invention.

### Detailed Description of the Invention

[0025] In order to provide fabrication of product lots from a manufacturing line within an enterprise to meet committed schedules, the lots must be scheduled to 15 dispatch each tool or piece of manufacturing equipment expeditiously. Further, to avoid having either long waiting or queuing times and having pieces of manufacturing equipment that are "starving" or have no queue, the scheduling must account for both the amount of product to be immediately processed and the capacity, capability, and present queue length of pieces of manufacturing equipment following the current piece of manufacturing equipment.

[0026] Refer now to Fig. 1 for a description of a manufacturing enterprise that dispatches product lots to the pieces of manufacturing equipment using the dispatching system of this invention. The manufacturing enterprise has multiple manufacturing lines **5** and **10**. In the example of an integrated circuits manufacturing enterprise, each manufacturing line **5** and **10** is a semiconductor processing line.

[0027] The manufacturing lines **5** and **10** each have a series of workstations or manufacturing stages **15a**, **15b**, ..., **15n** and **25a**, **25b**, ..., **25n**. Each of the manufacturing stages **15a**, **15b**, ..., **15n** and **25a**, **25b**, ..., **25n** has multiple tools or pieces of manufacturing equipment each of which perform various processes in the fabrication of the product lots. In the capital intensive operation, as in the integrated circuit fabrication example, many of the pieces of manufacturing equipment are extremely expensive and must be utilized to their fullest. However, as noted before, those product lots that have a high priority for delivery must be processed expeditiously to meet the committed schedules.

[0028] Each of the pieces of manufacturing equipment within each of the manufacturing stages **15a**, **15b**, ..., **15n** and **25a**, **25b**, ..., **25n** is in communication with the manufacturing execution systems **20a**, ..., **20n**. The manufacturing execution systems **20a**, ..., **20n** provide control and scheduling for each of the manufacturing stages **15a**, **15b**, ..., **15n** and **25a**, **25b**, ..., **25n**. Further, the manufacturing stages **15a**, **15b**, ..., **15n** and **25a**, **25b**, ..., **25n** transmit a status of the product lot's progress or work-in-process (WIP) status

describing the advancing of the product lot through the manufacturing stages  
**15a, 15b, ..., 15n or 25a, 25b, ..., 25n.**

[0029] The manufacturing execution systems **20a, ..., 20n** are in communication with the computer integrating network **30** which allows the manufacturing execution systems **20a, ..., 20n** to communicate with the necessary control and information systems to allow for dispatch and scheduling of product lots to the manufacturing lines **5 and 10**.

[0030] The dispatch system **35** has a lot dispatcher **50** and a Kanban factor calculator **55**. The lot dispatcher **50** is in communication with the order entry database **40** and the process information database **45**. The order entry database **40** provides a listing of the product lots to be fabricated. With the listing of the product lots are linkages or pointers to the process information database **45**. The process information database **45** provides a description of the recipe for the fabrication of the product and thus a process flow describing the required manufacturing equipment required to produce the product. The dispatch system **35** is further in communication with the manufacturing execution systems **20a, ..., 20n** to receive the status of the fabrication of all product lots, a criticality factor for each piece of manufacturing equipment, and a queue level for each piece of manufacturing equipment.

[0031] The lot dispatcher is in communication with the Kanban factor calculator **55** to provide the listing of product lots being fabricated, the order of the execution of the process necessary to produce the product lots and the

manufacturing equipment used to perform the processes. The status of each lot, the criticality factor of each piece of manufacturing equipment being employed in the process of each product lot, and the queue level of each piece of manufacturing equipment following the current piece of manufacturing equipment processing each of the product lots. The Kanban factor then creates a measure of the priority necessary to balance the loading such that the product lot is processed at an expeditious time for on-time delivery.

[0032] While one stage of the manufacturing stages **15a, 15b, ..., 15n or 25a,**

**25b, ..., 25n** is performing its step in the execution of the procedures for fabrication of the product lot, the dispatch schedule for the next stage of the product lot is determined by the method as shown in Fig. 2. The lot dispatcher **50** starts the evaluation (Box **100**) of the load balancing, efficiency, and capacity by testing (Box **105**) the type of tool of a group of the pieces of manufacturing equipment immediately following the piece of manufacturing equipment for which the product lots are being scheduled. If the group of immediately following pieces of manufacturing equipment is of a first type, in the example of the integrated circuit processing, the type of manufacturing equipment could be a cleaning tool that removes contaminants from substrates during the processing. The lot dispatcher **50** then tests (Box **110**) the type of tool of the group of pieces of manufacturing equipment that is the next following or third group of pieces of manufacturing equipment following the piece of manufacturing equipment executing its procedure for the fabrication of the product lot. In this instance, the test (Box **110**) is to determine if the next following piece of manufacturing

equipment is of a second type. In the example of integrated circuit processing, the type of the piece of manufacturing equipment would be, for illustration, a processing furnace. The criticality factor the group of the next piece of equipment is evaluated (Box 115), if either the group of the following pieces of manufacturing equipment is not of the first type or the group of next following pieces of manufacturing equipment is not of the second type. If the criticality factor the group of the following pieces of manufacturing equipment is low and the group of the following pieces of equipment does not have an impact on the time for processing of the product lot, the Kanban factor is set (Box 125) to zero.

10 [0033] Alternately, if the criticality factor of the group of the following pieces of manufacturing equipment is high and the group of the following pieces of equipment has an impact upon the time to process of the product lot, the Kanban factor calculator 55 determines (Box 130) a first priority or first Kanban level for the Kanban factor by the formula:

$$15 \quad KF\_1 = \frac{WIP\_c}{TOOL\#\_c * PPH\_c * EFF\_c} \quad (A)$$

where:

KF\_1 is the first priority level or Kanban level for of a product lot entering a group of current pieces of manufacturing equipment.

20 WIP\_c is a number of items within all product lots in queue for the group of first following pieces of manufacturing equipment.

**TOOL#\_c** is a number of pieces of equipment within a group of the first following pieces of manufacturing equipment.

**PPH\_c** is the average number of items of product capable of being manufactured by each piece of the group of the first following pieces of manufacturing equipment. In the illustration the capability of the manufacturing equipment would be in wafers per hour or **(WPH)** for a piece of substrate cleaning equipment.

**EFF\_c** is an efficiency factor for the group of the first following pieces of manufacturing equipment.

10 [0034] If the group of the following piece of manufacturing equipment is of the first type and the group of next following pieces of manufacturing equipment are of the second type, the criticality factor of the group of next following pieces of manufacturing equipment is evaluated (Box 120). If the criticality factor of the group of next following pieces of manufacturing equipment is low and group of next following pieces of manufacturing equipment does not have an impact on the time for processing of the product lot, the Kanban factor is set (Box 150) to zero.

15 [0035] On the other hand, if the criticality factor of the group of next following pieces of manufacturing equipment is high and group of next following pieces of manufacturing equipment has an impact upon the time for processing the product

lot, the Kanban factor calculator 55 determines the Kanban factor at a second priority or Kanban level determined (Box 135) by the formula:

$$KF\_2 = \frac{WIP\_cd + INPR\_cd + WIP\_d}{TOOL\#_d * PPH\_d * EFF\_d}$$

where:

5  $KF\_2$  is the second priority or Kanban level for of a product lot  
entering a current group of pieces of manufacturing equipment.

10  $WIP\_cd$  is a number of items within all product lots in queue for the  
group of first following pieces of manufacturing equipment and  
the group of second following pieces of manufacturing  
equipment.

15  $INPR\_cd$  is a number of items within all product lots in queue for  
the group of first following pieces of manufacturing equipment  
which are to proceed subsequently to the group of second  
following pieces of manufacturing equipment.

20  $WIP\_d$  is a number of items within all product lots in queue for the  
group of second following pieces of manufacturing equipment.

25  $TOOL\#_d$  is a number of pieced of equipment within a group of the  
second following pieces of manufacturing equipment.

5

**PPH\_d** is the average number of items of product capable of being manufactured by the group of the second following pieces of manufacturing equipment. In the illustration the capability of the manufacturing equipment would be in wafers per hour or (**WPH**) for a piece of substrate cleaning equipment.

**EFF\_d** is an efficiency factor for the group of the second following pieces of manufacturing equipment.

[0036] Upon completion of the calculations of the Kanban factor at either the first priority level or second priority level, the lot dispatcher **50** test (Box **140**) the calculated Kanban factor for each of the product lots ready for dispatch to the next following group of pieces of manufacturing equipment. If the Kanban factor is greater than a threshold value, the lots are assigned (Box **145**) a high priority for dispatch. Alternately, if the Kanban factor is less than a threshold value, the lots are assigned (Box **150**) a low priority for dispatch. The lot dispatcher **50** then communicates a product lot dispatch instruction to each of the manufacturing execution systems **20a**, ..., **20n** such that the product lots are appropriately dispatched (Box **155**) to pieces of manufacturing equipment within the manufacturing stages **15a**, **15b**, ..., **15n** or **25a**, **25b**, ..., **25n**.

[0037] As would be understood by one skilled in the art, the lot dispatch system would be integrated and function as a program process within the manufacturing execution systems **20a**, ..., **20n**. This program process may be incorporated within each of the manufacturing execution systems **20a**, ..., **20n** or may, in a

separate server system, provide support for the manufacturing execution systems **20a**, ..., **20n**. The program process, when executed, causes the manufacturing execution system **20a**, ..., **20n** executing the process to function as the dispatching system **35** as described. Further the program process is 5 encoded as program code executable by the computer systems of the manufacturing execution systems **20a**, ..., **20n** and is stored on a data retention media such as magnetic or optical disks, random access memory, or read only memory.

10 [0038] The manufacturing execution systems **20a**, ..., **20n** maintain a manufacturing information database as shown in Fig. 3, and provide the appropriate product lot status and criticality factor to the dispatch system **35**. The manufacturing information database **200** illustrates the routing for each product lot as it progresses through the pieces of equipment of each of the manufacturing stages **15a**, **15b**, ..., **15n** or **25a**, **25b**, ..., **25n**. The stage number is the 15 designator for each manufacturing stage **15a**, **15b**, ..., **15n** or **25a**, **25b**, ..., **25n** through which a given product lot is to progress. In the illustration shown, the product lot is in one of the pieces of equipment of the manufacturing stage **210** designated **100**. The database **200** shows the dispatch view **215** and the lot view **220**. The dispatch view **215** exemplifies the lot dispatcher view where current 20 tool (**200**) is the piece or group of pieces of manufacturing equipment that is to receive the product lot or lots upon completion. The downstream tools are the following and next following pieces of manufacturing equipment in the succession of the process of the product lot. The lot view **220** shows the location of the

product lot within each stage or the manufacturing stages **15a**, **15b**, ..., **15n** or **25a**, **25b**, ..., **25n**. The current tool **221** is performing the operation necessary for the current step of the process for the fabrication of the product lot. For instance, in an integrated circuit fabrication, if the piece of manufacturing equipment is a cleaning tool, the substrate will have contaminants and undesired process material removed. Alternately, if the piece of manufacturing equipment is a furnace, the substrate is subjected to an operation such as diffusion of material into the surface of the substrate. The next tool **222** is following in the process for which the dispatch schedule is being created. The next two tools **223** and **224** are the subsequent tools for which their capabilities, capacities, and queues are to be balanced in the dispatch the next tool **222**. The tool identification **225** provides the designation of the group of pieces of manufacturing equipment that is required in the recipe of the process for the product lot. The criticality factor **230** is a designation of the impact of the usage of the piece of manufacturing equipment on the time involved to process the product lot and the impact the piece of equipment has on in the flow of product lots through the manufacturing lines **5** and **10**. In this example there are two criticality levels, none or the group of pieces of manufacturing equipment does not have an impact on the processing time as indicated by a blank entry. The group of pieces of manufacturing equipment may be critical to the processing of the product lot as indicated by the **Y**. Alternately, if there is a long queue of product lots waiting for the particular piece of manufacturing equipment, the

whole manufacturing line **5** or **10** may be slowed, thus delaying delivery of product lots in a timely fashion.

[0039] While this invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to the preferred embodiments thereof, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes in form and details may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

[0040] The invention claimed is:

- 1    1. A system for dispatching of at least one product lot for processing to  
2        manufacturing equipment within processing stages of a manufacturing line, said  
3        system comprising:
  - 4            a lot dispatcher in communication with an order entry system to receive  
5                requests for fabrication of a product lot, in communication with a  
6                process information system to receive procedures defining which  
7                manufacturing equipment is required for said fabrication of said  
8                product lot, and in communication with a manufacturing information  
9                system to receive a status of said fabrication of said product lot, a  
10                criticality factor for each piece of manufacturing equipment, and a  
11                queue level for each piece manufacturing equipment that follows a  
12                current group of pieces of manufacturing equipment required for said  
13                product lot; and
  - 14                a priority factor calculator in communication with said lot dispatcher to  
15                receive a listing of said manufacturing equipment required for said  
16                fabrication of product, said criticality factor, and said queue level, for  
17                determining a priority factor for said product lot such that each group of  
18                pieces of manufacturing equipment following said current group of  
19                pieces of manufacturing equipment has a balanced loading and said  
20                product lot is processed at an expeditious time for on-time delivery.
- 1    2. The system for dispatching of claim 1 wherein:

2 if groups of first following pieces of manufacturing equipment have a  
3 criticality factor of a first level, said priority factor has a first priority  
4 level, and

5 if groups of first following pieces of manufacturing equipment are of a first  
6 type and if groups of second following pieces of manufacturing  
7 equipment are of a second type, said priority factor has a second  
8 priority level.

1 3. The system for dispatching of claim 2 wherein if a magnitude of said first priority  
2 level achieves a threshold level, said product lot is immediately dispatched for  
3 processing.

1 4. The system for dispatching of claim 2 wherein if said second priority level  
2 achieves the threshold level, said product lot is immediately dispatched for  
3 processing.

1 5. The system for dispatching of claim 2 wherein:

2 said priority factor calculator determines said first priority factor level by  
3 the formula:

4 
$$KF\_1 = \frac{WIP\_c}{TOOL\#\_c * PPH\_c * EFF\_c}$$

5 where:

6                   **KF\_1** is said first priority level for a product lot entering a group  
7                   of current pieces of manufacturing equipment

8                   **WIP\_c** is a number of items within all product lots in a queue for  
9                   the group of first following pieces of manufacturing  
10                  equipment,

11                  **TOOL#\_c** is a number of pieces of equipment within a group of  
12                  the first following pieces of manufacturing equipment;

13                  **PPH\_c** is an average number of items of product capable of  
14                  being manufactured by said group of the first following  
15                  pieces of manufacturing equipment,

16                  **EFF\_c** is an efficiency factor for said group of the first following  
17                  pieces of manufacturing equipment.

1       6.       The system for dispatching of claim 2 wherein:

2                  said priority factor calculator determines said second priority level by the  
3                  formula:

4                  
$$KF\_2 = \frac{WIP\_cd + INPR\_cd + WIP\_d}{TOOL\#_d * PPH\_d * EFF\_d}$$

5                  where:

6                   KF\_2 is said second priority level for a product lot entering a  
7                   current group of pieces of manufacturing equipment

8                   WIP\_cd is a number of items within all product lots in queue for  
9                   the group of first following pieces of manufacturing  
10                   equipment and the group of second following pieces of  
11                   manufacturing equipment,

12                   INPR\_cd is a number of items within all product lots in queue  
13                   for the group of first following pieces of manufacturing  
14                   equipment which are to proceed subsequently to the group  
15                   of second following pieces of manufacturing equipment,

16                   WIP\_d is a number of items within all product lots in queue for  
17                   the group of second following pieces of manufacturing  
18                   equipment,

19                   TOOL#\_d is number of pieces of equipment within a group of  
20                   the second following pieces of manufacturing equipment;

21                   PPH\_d is an average number of items of product capable of  
22                   being manufactured by said group of the second following  
23                   pieces of manufacturing equipment,

24                   EFF\_d is an efficiency factor for said group of the second  
25                   following pieces of manufacturing equipment.

1      7.     The system for dispatching of claim 2 wherein if the group of first following pieces  
2                of manufacturing equipment has a criticality factor of a second level, said priority  
3                factor has a third priority level.

1      8.     The system for dispatching of claim 7 wherein if said third priority level indicates  
2                that said product lot should not be immediately dispatched for processing, said  
3                product lot is placed on the queue of one of the first following pieces of  
4                manufacturing equipment.

5      9.     The system for dispatching of claim 2 wherein if the group of first following pieces  
6                of manufacturing equipment is not of the first type, said priority factor has a fourth  
7                priority level.

1      10.    The system for dispatching of claim 9 wherein if said fourth priority level indicates  
2                that said product lot should not be immediately dispatched for processing, said  
3                product lot is placed on one queue of one of the first following pieces of  
4                manufacturing equipment.

1      11.    The system for dispatching of claim 2 wherein if the group of second following  
2                pieces of manufacturing equipment is not of the second type, said priority factor  
3                has a fifth priority level.

1      12.    The system for dispatching of claim 11 wherein if said fifth priority level indicates  
2                that said product lot should not be immediately dispatched for processing, said  
3                product lot is placed on the queue of one of the first following pieces of  
4                manufacturing equipment.

- 1 13. The system for dispatching of claim 2 wherein if the group of first following pieces
- 2 of manufacturing equipment is of the first type, and the group of second following
- 3 pieces of manufacturing equipment is of the second type, and the group of
- 4 second following pieces of manufacturing equipment has a criticality factor that is
- 5 not the first level, said priority factor has a sixth priority level.
- 1 14. The system for dispatching of claim 13 wherein if said sixth priority level indicates
- 2 that said product lot should not be immediately dispatched for processing, said
- 3 product lot is placed on the queue of one of the first following pieces of
- 4 manufacturing equipment.
- 1 15. The system for dispatching of claim 1 wherein said product is substrates onto
- 2 which integrated circuits are fabricated.
- 1 16. The system for dispatching of claim 1 wherein said manufacturing equipment is
- 2 integrated circuit processing equipment for the formation of integrated circuits
- 3 upon substrates.
- 1 17. The system for dispatching of claim 1 wherein the integrated circuit processing
- 2 equipment includes furnaces and substrate cleaning equipment.
- 1 18. A method for dispatching of at least one product lot for processing manufacturing
- 2 equipment within processing stages of a manufacturing line, said system
- 3 comprising the steps of:

4 receiving requests for fabrication of a product lot from an order entry  
5 system;

6 receiving procedures defining which manufacturing equipment is required  
7 for said fabrication of said product lot from a process information  
8 system;

9 receiving a status of said fabrication of said product lot, a criticality factor  
10 for each manufacturing equipment, and a queue level for each piece of  
11 manufacturing equipment that follows a current group of pieces of  
12 manufacturing equipment required for said product lot from a  
13 manufacturing information system;

14 calculating a priority factor for said product lot from a listing of said  
15 manufacturing equipment required for said fabrication of product, said  
16 criticality factor, and said queue level,

17 balancing of loading of each group of pieces of manufacturing equipment  
18 following said current group of pieces of manufacturing equipment from  
19 said priority factor such that said product lot is processed at an  
20 expeditious time for on-time delivery.

1 19. The method for dispatching of claim 18 further comprising the steps of:

2 setting said priority factor to a first priority level, if groups of first following  
3 pieces of manufacturing equipment have a criticality factor of a first  
4 level, and

5 setting said priority factor has a second priority level, if groups of first  
6 following pieces of manufacturing equipment are of a first type and if  
7 groups of second following pieces of manufacturing equipment are of a  
8 second type.

1 20. The method for dispatching of claim 19 further comprising the step of dispatching  
2 said product lot for processing, if a magnitude of said first priority level achieves a  
3 threshold level.

1 21. The method for dispatching of claim 19 further comprising the step of dispatching  
2 said product lot for processing, if said second priority level achieves the threshold  
3 level.

1 22. The method for dispatching of claim 19 wherein:

2 calculating said priority factor comprises the step of determining said first  
3 priority factor level by the formula:

4 
$$KF\_1 = \frac{WIP\_c}{TOOL\#\_c * PPH\_c * EFF\_c}$$

5 where:

6                   **KF\_1** is said first priority level for a product lot entering a group  
7                   of current pieces of manufacturing equipment

8                   **WIP\_c** is a number of items within all product lots in queue for  
9                   the group of first following pieces of manufacturing  
10                  equipment,

11                  **TOOL#\_c** is a number of pieces of equipment within a group of  
12                  the first following pieces of manufacturing equipment;

13                  **PPH\_c** is an average number of items of product capable of  
14                  being manufactured by said group of the first following  
15                  pieces of manufacturing equipment,

16                  **EFF\_c** is an efficiency factor for said group of the first following  
17                  pieces of manufacturing equipment.

1   23.   The method for dispatching of claim 19 wherein:

2                   calculating said priority factor comprises the step of determining said  
3                   second priority level by the formula:

4                   
$$KF\_2 = \frac{WIP\_cd + INPR\_cd + WIP\_d}{TOOL\#_d * PPH\_d * EFF\_d}$$

5                   where:

6                   KF\_2 is said second priority level for a product lot entering a  
7                   current group of pieces of manufacturing equipment

8                   WIP\_cd is a number of items within all product lots in queue for  
9                   the group of first following pieces of manufacturing  
10                   equipment and the group of second following pieces of  
11                   manufacturing equipment,

12                   INPR\_cd is a number of items within all product lots in queue  
13                   for the group of first following pieces of manufacturing  
14                   equipment which are to proceed subsequently to the group  
15                   of second following pieces of manufacturing equipment,

16                   WIP\_d is a number of items within all product lots in queue for  
17                   the group of second following pieces of manufacturing  
18                   equipment,

19                   TOOL#\_d is number of pieces of equipment within a group of  
20                   the second following pieces of manufacturing equipment;

21                   PPH\_d is an average number of items of product capable of  
22                   being manufactured by said group of the second following  
23                   pieces of manufacturing equipment,

24                   EFF\_d is an efficiency factor for said group of the second  
25                   following pieces of manufacturing equipment.

- 1 24. The method for dispatching of claim 19 wherein calculating said priority factor
- 2 comprises the step of setting said priority factor to a third priority level, if the
- 3 group of first following pieces of manufacturing equipment has a criticality factor
- 4 of a second level.
- 1 25. The method for dispatching of claim 24 further comprising the step of placing
- 2 said product lot on the queue of one of the first following pieces of manufacturing
- 3 equipment, if said third priority level indicates that said product lot should not be
- 4 immediately dispatched for processing.
- 1 26. The method for dispatching of claim 19 wherein if the group of first following
- 2 pieces of manufacturing equipment is not of the first type, said priority factor has
- 3 a fourth priority level.
- 1 27. The method for dispatching of claim 26 further comprising the step of placing
- 2 said product lot on the queue of one of the first following pieces of manufacturing
- 3 equipment, if said fourth priority level indicates that said product lot should not be
- 4 immediately dispatched for processing.
- 1 28. The method for dispatching of claim 19 wherein if the group of second following
- 2 pieces of manufacturing equipment is not of the second type, said priority factor
- 3 has a fifth priority level.
- 1 29. The method for dispatching of claim 28 further comprising the step of placing
- 2 said product lot on the queue of one of the first following pieces of manufacturing

3                   equipment, if said fifth priority level indicates that said product lot should not be  
4                   immediately dispatched for processing..

1   30. The method for dispatching of claim 19 wherein if the group of first following  
2                   pieces of manufacturing equipment is of the first type, and the group of second  
3                   following pieces of manufacturing equipment is of the second type, and the group  
4                   of second following pieces of manufacturing equipment has a criticality factor that  
5                   is not the first level, said priority factor has a sixth priority level.

1   31. The method for dispatching of claim 30 further comprising the step of placing  
2                   said product lot on the queue of one of the first following pieces of manufacturing  
3                   equipment, if said sixth priority level indicates that said product lot should not be  
4                   immediately dispatched for processing.

1   32. The method for dispatching of claim 18 wherein said product is substrates onto  
2                   which integrated circuits are fabricated.

1   33. The method for dispatching of claim 18 wherein said manufacturing equipment is  
2                   integrated circuit processing equipment for the formation of integrated circuits  
3                   upon substrates.

1   34. The method for dispatching of claim 18 wherein the integrated circuit processing  
2                   equipment includes furnaces and substrate cleaning equipment.

1 35. An apparatus for dispatching at least one product lot for processing to  
2 manufacturing equipment within processing stages of a manufacturing line, said  
3 system comprising:

4 means for receiving to receive requests for fabrication of a product lot from  
5 an order entry system;

6 means for receiving procedures defining which manufacturing equipment  
7 is required for said fabrication of said product lot from a process  
8 information system;

9 means for receiving a status of said fabrication of said product lot, a  
10 criticality factor for each manufacturing equipment, and a queue level  
11 for each piece manufacturing equipment that follows a current group of  
12 pieces of manufacturing equipment required for said product lot from a  
13 manufacturing information system;

14 means for calculating a priority factor for said product lot from a listing of  
15 said manufacturing equipment required for said fabrication of product,  
16 said criticality factor, and said queue level,

17 means for balancing the loading of each group of pieces of manufacturing  
18 equipment following said current group of pieces of manufacturing  
19 equipment from said priority factor such that said product lot is  
20 processed at an expeditious time for on-time delivery.

1 36. The apparatus for dispatching of claim 35 further comprising:

2 means for setting said priority factor to a first priority level, if groups of first  
3 following pieces of manufacturing equipment have a criticality factor of  
4 a first level, and

5 means for setting said priority factor to a second priority level, if groups of  
6 first following pieces of manufacturing equipment are of a first type and  
7 if groups of second following pieces of manufacturing equipment are of  
8 a second type.

1 37. The apparatus for dispatching of claim 36 further comprising means for  
2 dispatching said product lot for processing, if a magnitude of said first priority  
3 level achieves a threshold level.

1 38. The apparatus for dispatching of claim 36 further comprising means for  
2 dispatching said product lot for processing, if said second priority level achieves  
3 the threshold level.

1 39. The apparatus for dispatching of claim 36 wherein:

2 the means for calculating said priority factor comprises means for  
3 determining said first priority factor level by the formula:

4 
$$KF\_1 = \frac{WIP\_c}{TOOL\#\_c * PPH\_c * EFF\_c}$$